

Yallourn Swimming Club by Arthur Brogan (circa 1991)

The Club was established down on the Latrobe River in 1930. It was located on the road to the Town Water Supply Pump House. The site is still accessible today from the same road which starts opposite Yallourn W Power Station, however it has changed a lot since the early swimming days.

In the early days swimmers had to walk or ride bikes from the town down an old bike track towards the Power Station, turn off before reaching the West Camp and then on past Horrie Devine's House/ Carrier Business and down the Pump House road.

The river was much wider then and the pool area was fenced off. The area had a sandy bottom and beach as well as a pontoon which was anchored further up the river for advanced swimmers. A diving board was located across the river on a rock cliff.



The 25 yard "Herald" certificate was obtained by swimming out to the pontoon. Many candidates were not able to swim back after completing their 25 yard test, and so were returned to shore by Harry Nairn who carried them on his back.

The Club was also active in Life Saving Awards and to a lesser degree in competition swimming. Top International swimmers and divers were also brought to the town by the Club to give diving and swimming displays at the old river pool.

Some of the early members of the club executive were Ben Drummond, Harry Nairn, Hugh Graham, Bill Spicer and Nick Bolger, all of whom remained active in the club for most of their working life and

many hundreds of children to swim. Hugh Graham was still active with the club teaching Life Saving well into the 1970's.

The 1934 flood destroyed the river pool and in 1936, a pool was opened for public use in the town. The pool was established on the dammed up Melbourne Swamp.



The Club continued to grow and prosper through the late 1930s. The old Club House from the river was relocated to the new pool and a Kiosk was operated by the club. During its lifetime, the Kiosk had three tenants, the earliest were the Carters, followed by the Prentices, then the Melbournes.

The Kiosk provided a great source of finance for club activities, particularly in areas of Learn to Swim and Life Saving Awards. In 1933/34 the Club won the Premiership of Victoria for the most Awards gained by a Club. In 1935/36 it came second to Edithvale, and in 1936/37 again won the Premiership.

In 1934/35 Harry Nairn won the Freshwater Diploma which was the highest award in Life Saving; he then gained the Saltwater Diploma in 1935/36. Another member ???? Drummond was successful in winning the Freshwater Diploma. Under Hughie Graham, the club won the Garden Cup for Resuscitation and the Sporting Judge Shield on several occasions.

In addition to Life Saving, the Club also concentrated on teaching children to swim as very few children in Yallourn were able to swim. Most of the work in the water was still being carried out by people who were active at the river pool, with Hugh Graham doing the lion's share in both spheres of activity.

Trips to Edithvale for Surf Life Saving Awards were an annual highlight for many years, particularly the trip in Horrie Devine's Furniture Van.

1940 was the start of a new era and new faces. During this time activity was subdued due to the war as well as the loss of some older members. Among the new faces were Arthur Brogan, Jim McAllister, Max Maddern, Des Maddern, Bill Trusler, Ken and Graham Cook, Pat Dunlop, Phyllis

Pennington, Pat Ward and Georgina Gilchrist. At the end of the war, the Club ran its first swimming carnival and a popular bathing beauty contest which was won by Wilma Irving (Suckling) before a crowd of approximately one thousand.

The period between the mid-40s to 1959 saw a change in club activities from mostly Life Saving and swimming teaching to include competition swimming. More clubs were being formed in Gippsland and therefore provided the opportunity for interclub competition. The Club produced some excellent competitive swimmers, the most successful being Lois Gust who gained placings in a number of events at the Country Championships. Others included Doug Woods, Bill Davey, Graeme Kitney, Neville Gapes, Jim Richardson, Geoff Hall, Janet Walton, Robyn Garden, Sandra Doxford, Lorraine Dupree, Margaret Wood, Heather Stewart, Jenny James, Mary Hutchinson and Ron Boyd.

Ron Boyd came to Yallourn Swimming Club as an established, highly ranked Victorian and Australian Backstroke Swimmer. Ron narrowly missed selection in the Australian Olympic Team for the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. Ron was from Melbourne and was transferred with his job to the SEC in Yallourn. Ron was coached by Bill Atkinson. Lois Gust also was tutored by Bill Atkinson at a residential training camp in Melbourne in 1957.



Back Row: Neville Gapes, Jim Richardson, Geoff Hall
2nd Back Row: Janet Walton, Lois Gust, Robyn Garden
2nd Row: Sandra Doxford, Lorraine Dupree, Margaret Wood
Front Row: Heather Stewart, Mary Hutchinson

When the new swimming pool opened in 1959, competition swimming boomed. The Yallourn Club had as many as 600 members and dominated interclub competition during the 1960's. The Club had major successes in Country and State Championships and this success was reflected in both the High School and Technical School teams. Many students from both schools were successful swimmers



Again during the 1960's the Club produced some excellent competitive swimmers. Penny Stitson was the leading female backstroke swimmer in Gippsland. She also won the Women's 100 metre backstroke at the Country Championships. Kay Bussell was the leading female butterfly swimmer in Gippsland. Kay also won the Women's 100 metre butterfly at the Country Championships. Erna Kimberley was outstanding as an all-round swimmer in Gippsland and a very competitive Country Championship Swimmer.



Yallourn Swimming Club Members – Early 1960's

Back Row (L-R): Erna Kimberley, Ray Garland, Doug Kimberley, Jim Fuller, Linton Planner, Geoff Atkinson, Stewart Delahay, Penny Bowler, Beverley Robertson, Martin Dolphin, Carol Ely, Geoff Mc Master, John Barnes, John Lambert, Bill Ley(Coach /Swimming Pools Supervisor).

Middle Row(L-R): John Kimberley, Ken Gray, Ian James, Neil Ashmead, Kevin Brogan, Paul Hilditch, Val Humphries, Jill Kitney, Isabel McLaren, Jenny James, Julie Graham, Cheryl Pattle, Lois Gust, Gabby Sova, Lorraine Dupree, Otto Ford.

Bottom Row: Sandra Vogel, Trevor Dolphin, John Vines, Marcia McDonald, Pauline Lock, Judy McDonald (partially hidden), Joan Ashmead, Penny Stitson, Suzanne Hilditch, Joan Vickery

Kristine Henry was also placed in Country Championship Tower Diving Events in the same period.

Life Saving continued to be a part of club activity but at a slower tempo under Hugh Graham, assisted by Margaret and Bev Robertson. The late 1960s and early 1970s were the club's twilight years and with the pool closure, activity moved to the Newborough heated pool, where the club again revived with considerable success in competition in Gippsland and both at State and National level. Carol England was a very successful swimmer in local and State titles. Club membership finally reached a level where it was necessary to amalgamate with Yallourn North and the last of the club of the 70s and 80s still functions at Yallourn North.

Footnote: Further information from Kevin Brogan (2015):

Cliff Cook is the Cliff Cook from C.V. Cook the Jewellers from Yallourn and then later Morwell and Moe. Cliff's son, Graham, was a Policeman in the district and spent the majority of his working life in Moe. Graham was a leading light in the Latrobe Valley Search and Rescue Organisation and personally directed a number of high profile searches in the area - predominantly on Mt Baw Baw and Mt Erica. Dad (Arthur) and Graham were members of the Mt Baw Baw Ski Club together. They were also Members of the Yallourn Swimming Club together. When Cliff retired and then ultimately died, Ray Larsen took over the jeweller's business. Ray was /is married to one of Cliff Cook's daughters. Larsens the Jewellers was also based in Morwell and Moe. I have a sneaky feeling that Cooks in Yallourn may also have been renamed as Larsens - although I am not sure. I guess Larsens are still around, but I don't think the jewellery business is still going (not entirely sure). Hughie Graham and Cliff Cook were both quite a bit older than Dad and died quite some time ago. One of the Swimming Shields competed for in the Gippsland Swimming Association is the CV Cook Shield. It was competed for in my day (it was presented to the Leading Club at the Gippsland Swimming Championships). I believe it is still competed for today. Cooks originally were housed in a small collection of shops in behind the new Library (between the Picture Theatre and the National Bank). Arthur Oliver's and Horrie Devine (Undertakers) were also there. They moved over to the new shops near Dolphins etc, opposite the PMG Exchange and RSL, when they were built.

The Manager of the Morwell Club was Ron Masters. He represented Australia in the 1936 Olympics and also in the 1938 'Empire Games' (he won the gold medal in the Tower Diving and the silver in the Spring Board). Dad (Arthur) and Ron knew each other very well as they both were members of the Bendigo Swimming Club, prior to venturing down to the Latrobe Valley to work. Unfortunately Ron was killed in a car accident (mid 70's I think).

Howard Beulke was a predominant official in the early days of the Yallourn Swimming Club. He was a senior Manager at the Yallourn Briquette Works. In the early days of sporting Clubs in Yallourn the senior positions, ie President (generally) were SECV appointments and usually were Senior Members of the Staff in the local SECV. 1939 is the year that Dad (Arthur) came down to Yallourn from Bendigo - so he would have been relatively new in the area. The old natural pool referred to is the old mud hole that was the swimming pool prior to the new one being opened in 1959. Harry Nairn taught my Mum (Marj) to swim in the Latrobe River and other people also refer to him from their learning to swim days.